

Dear FCC,

The FCC is woefully late in starting its planning for the transition to digital television, seeing as the transition began in 1996 (if memory serves), making today eight years into the planned ten-year transition.

What happened? Somebody else's watch?

When the transition started, the government said after 85 percent of the viewing households in an area had transitioned to digital, the remaining fifteen percent would have to buy digital-to-analog converter (set-top) boxes. Now are you saying you're changing your policy?

The big part of the problem is that the consumer electronics industry, with the tacit acceptance by the government, has been manipulating your so-called market forces (which were supposed to be driving the transition) by keeping the public in the dark about the coming demise of NTSC television. Legitimate market forces can only work if the consumer is informed. This is certainly not the case. People have been walking into big-box electronics stores and walking out with millions if not billions of NTSC sets every year since the beginning of the transition, and even today consumers continue to blissfully buy analog sets without a clue to the fact that those sets are already obsolete.

The FCC should have taken action in 1996 to educate the consumer to the transition to digital television. Placing information on your web site is nice but wholly ineffective. The FCC continues to do nothing effective to educate the consumer. The consumer electronics industry is fat and happy with consumers buying NTSC sets--keep that revenue flowing!

The FCC should mail a flyer to every household in the United States describing the nitty-gritty details of the transition to digital television. The FCC should require a warning notice to be affixed to the screen of every new NTSC set offered for sale in the US--such label to be removed only by the consumer upon penalty of law. Every day that passes with consumers buying NTSC sets serves to worsen the burden on the American consumer and the FCC has known this for many years and done nothing about it.

If consumers knew the truth, they would STOP BUYING analog sets and start asking for a good selection of digital sets with integrated tuners. Then the problem would stop getting worse. Oh, but then the FCC would have to stand up to the industry lobby, and angry consumers would ask why they weren't told about the transition earlier. Make everybody happy: pay the industry to manufacture D/A converters and give them away to the consumer. It's only money; we can borrow it, never have to pay it back.

And now the FCC is asking for data on the American consumer and his/her television sets. I'm sitting here scratching my head; if the FCC wants polling results, why doesn't the FCC commission and pay to have a poll taken? Certainly the results would (we hope) be less biased than the information that the industry lobbyists are going to provide.

My little piece: I live in a household that has four actively watched television sets, all NTSC (unfortunately). Three of those sets receive only over-the-air local channel broadcasts via a large VHF-UHF antenna

on the roof. The fourth set gets local channels via the same antenna plus satellite channels. Why do we get our programming over-the-air? It's free. Cable is unconscionably expensive. Over-the-air is the only way to get broadcast-network HDTV programming.

It seems the digital sets the electronics stores are pushing are mostly all "HD-ready" notwithstanding the FCC's upcoming tuner mandate. It would seem that the industry is for some reason discouraging consumers from buying digital TVs with digital tuners in them. I don't know; I've heard them say there is no "demand" for such sets, notwithstanding the general unavailability of broadcast digital programming via cable or satellite. Maybe they assume (would prefer) that everyone gets their programming via cable or satellite. Maybe they're just back to manipulating -market forces- to support their own agendas. (Haven't they read Sinclair's recent endorsement of the 5th gen 8-VSB tuners?!) If I could go to the store and find a good selection of digital TV sizes (all with integral digital tuners), I would go out and buy one. Scarce. But there is still a big selection of NTSC sets, most with dual NTSC tuners (why would that be, if everyone gets their programming via cable or satellite?).

The FCC says -we seek comment on the extent to which market forces can be expected to deal with this problem- and gives as an example of how this might work: -consumers voluntarily buying digital-to-analog converter boxes before the end of the transition- (two years hence). Then you ask -What do converter boxes cost today and what are they expected to cost in the future?- Don't they let you out of the building up there? Have you ever considered getting in your car and driving to your local Best Buy or Circuit City? Converter box? Have you seen a D/A converter box for sale? Have you even bothered to look? There are none. Are you crazy? How would a salesperson explain the function of the converter box? -Well, you have to buy this \$500 box so that the \$300 analog television set I just sold you will receive modern broadcasts, and oh, of course, even with this box, you won't be able to realize the improved video and audio quality that you would have with a digital set.-

There is no incentive for anyone to build D/A converter boxes until after analog signals are shut off. I suppose that is where the government buys them and stockpiles them to hand out to the 30 million irate uninformed consumers. A better solution is for consumers to buy digital sets today, to get ATSC sets of all sizes on the market now. The best way to do that is to alert consumers to the imminent demise of NTSC programming.

Why can't I go out and easily find a selection of 27" direct-view/CRT widescreen TVs with integrated digital tuners? Because the consumer electronics industry is allowed to sell NTSC versions for \$250 with no notice that the sets do not comply with current television standards. Eighteen years ago I paid about \$800 for a 27 inch NTSC monitor! Don't let anyone tell you that consumers would not pay \$1000 TODAY for a better performing integrated ATSC set of comparable size.

Subsidies? Tax credit? Tax credits are for people who make enough money to buy their own digital set or D/A/ converter. There will be no demand until the analog signals are cut off. Why get a converter box if you can get the same programming without the converter box. Using a

converter box will not give you the advantages of improved resolution, aspect ration matching programming, and multi-channel sound. The only thing it will do is to make your NTSC TV function after NTSC signals have been shut off. Any program to get digital converter boxes into the hands of consumers will be futile unless a date certain is established for the termination of analog broadcasts.

Back to the main point. Consumer education NOW is the first step. Everything else is secondary; nothing you do will work unless and until you first take the education step.